7: International Bank N, S-4 (1951) 1952 MH1 Iraq MH1

II. Rural Communities

About one third of the people live in towns and cities; of the remainder, a small proportion are nomads and the bulk live in villages. In terms of population, therefore, the villages are the more predominant type of community. Although the distinction between a village and a small municipality is, as already noted, somewhat arbitrary, even the smallest municipalities are centers of local administration and have certain facilities of a higher standard than the villages. The distinction will, in any event, serve for present purposes.

Virtually all the rural population live in villages, isolated dwellings being very rare. Landowners, in fact, frequently count their fellahin by villages. Except for the extreme northwest, where there are seminomadic pastoral tribes who live in settled communities for only part of the year, the inhabitants of the villages are mainly cultivators. A few members of the community may have other occupations such as the tending of sheep and goats, the keeping of small shops and coffee houses or the building and repairing of huts. There are, also, villages where a considerable number of the people are engaged in handicrafts (e.g. weaving) but these are rare.

In the North, stone is generally available and is the commonest material for buildings, while in the South and the Center, mud is the usual material. The mud plaster of walls is reinforced with straw or cow dung to minimize the washing of clay in the mortar when it rains and to prevent temperature cracks. Where the climate is drier and palm leaves or reeds are available, especially in the marshes and palm belt of the South, these materials are more extensively used.

Another feature which distinguishes the North from the rest of the country is the greater permanence of the villages. The main reason is probably that there is a much older tradition of settled cultivation than exists in the recently irrigated areas. Not only are there more small-holders, who would naturally have a close association with their land, but the fellahin also appear to have A GREATER SECURITY OF TENURE.